

Wednesday, March 10, 1999

Duxbury Clipper

Health Board Responds to Septic System Concerns

(The following letter was sent to Jeanne McKinney by Rebecca Chin and Georgeann Blatterman, chairman and vice chairman, respectively, of the Duxbury Board of Health — Ed.)

We are writing to you because we read your letter in today's (March 3) Clipper. We wanted to first

of all, once again, apologize for the fact that the Board of Health does not have a budget to cover the expense of individualized mailing campaigns. The Board has utilized newspaper announcements to notify and invite the public to public hearings. The Bay Rd. Study meetings were announced in the fall of 1997 in just that fashion. Many Bay Rd. residents and other interested members of the public did attend those informational study meetings. They contributed to the final report by adding information, and allowing for ongoing review of the study's progress. The final report was released and made available to the public, again through public notices in the newspapers, in March of 1988. Those notices included information about how the public could obtain the report personally, or review the report at Duxbury's library. The Board deliberately waited to hold a public hearing on the final report to give the public a chance to digest the information, and make any inquiries, since much of the report was of a technical nature. The public hearing to discuss the report was in June 1998, and again announced in the newspapers.

Pollution in the Bay had not been a new concept to any of the communities bordering the

Bay, and known to be a problem as early as the 1920's. In the early 1990's and again in 1997, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries conducted and issued a "Sanitary Survey and Report of Kingston Bay." In that survey specific testing documented contamination from septic systems and was able to identify sources. This information led Duxbury to approve funding for a comprehensive study of the extent of our current pollution problem, and to give predictive information about problems we could expect in the future. The study also was designed to give solutions to the problems identified. The Board of Health hired Stone Environmental because of their extensive experience with coastal communities. Their report confirmed the information from Marine Fisheries, and went on to identify three levels of concern, and to document what available solutions there were for each level.

Levels 2 and 3 (which number 180 homes) have onsite or in their yard solutions. Some with small lot sizes may need shared (2-4) neighbor systems. There were 36 homes identified in Level 1, one home due to its location will need an alternative technology system, four will use alternative technology or will utilize a small neighborhood shared system. The 31 homes that remain have no onsite or in their yard options due to poor soil conditions and high groundwater.

The Board of Health voted to endorse the expert's recommended solution of a shared septic system. This action by the Board was made after exhaustive review of the study, many conversations with the

experts from Stone Environmental and Beta Engineering, the Public Hearing discussing the alternative solutions, and notification to the Board of the 31 effected homeowners' support of a shared system.

The Board has had an opportunity since our endorsement to study and review much data on all of the possible solutions. It is our conclusion that the shared septic system is still the best solution. We have determined that the system is

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safe and concerns about safety are determined by three important factors. These factors are proper siting, proper operation, and proper maintenance. The Town of Duxbury will be responsible and accomplish this. Town ownership and control along with a history of just such success will ensure this. Duxbury as you know has received awards for our other two systems, and they were the first in Massachusetts, however experience in other New England states shows a much longer history of just the kind of success we will have here.

The users of the system will be responsible for the entire cost to construct and annually for operation and maintenance. The difference between this system and Snug Harbor is the

commercial users of the system who are assessed differently from residential users (per state regulations). Rates are in line with projections from design and start-up.

Real estate values have not been negatively impacted, for the homes abutting the Blue Fish system on St. George and Cedar streets. Nor have the homes for the Snug Harbor system (leaching at Duxbury Yacht Club) on Harrison St.

The Board has continued to study the Kingston option. We have found that the problems identified in the Bay Rd. study are still problematic. Our contact with Kingston about Duxbury's involvement in their system dates back to 1989 (according to former Board members). Kingston was not interested in Duxbury's participation. Currently Kingston officials have told Duxbury officials they would be interested in 35 homes, but are not interested in any more. The problems with their own financing shortfall, permits not yet in hand, and soon to be elected new sewer commissioners make Kingston not an option.

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We hope the details in this letter will answer some of your concerns. Should you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact the Board of Health office at 934-1105.

Rebecca Chin, Chairman
Georgeann Blatterman,
Vice Chairman
Duxbury Board of Health